

Don't Isolate Ourselves

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Summary:

- Scholars inside China have debated on the role that China should play in the international community. Some of them have espoused a kind of “isolationism,” characterizing an unyielding confrontation between self-development and China’s rightful role in the international community.
- Learning from the lessons of our past does not mean that we should be isolationist. Shutting ourselves out from the outside world will not only be against the tide of global development but also be in violation of China’s own national interest.
- The momentum of hegemonism can only be thwarted. World peace can only be guaranteed if all the weaker and smaller countries in the world become united, reinforce each other and resolutely fight against hegemonism and the politics of “Might Makes Right.”

As we struggle against American attempts to isolate and contain China, we must also prevent a tendency to isolate ourselves. In recent years, our scholarly circles have debated what role China should play in the international community. Some of us have expressed a strong inclination toward “isolationism.” On July 30, *The Globe Times* published an opinion-editorial entitled “Strength Gap Is the Reality,” which epitomizes such “isolationist” sentiments. The author of the op-ed holds the view that [we should] “be less concerned with others’ business, keep vigilance at our own door step and focus on self-strengthening.” The primary reasons given for this argument are as follows: “China still is a third world country, with meager existing assets, unmatched with developed countries in economy, science and technology and the military;” “The United States ... is a rich country, the ‘leader of the world,’ the police of the world. But we don’t have to and are unable to be all that. We should strengthen ourselves, enhance our national cohesiveness, and increase the comprehensive national power and fighting capability of our military.”

The author of the op-ed characterizes an unyielding confrontation between self-development and China’s rightful role in the international community. Despite his benign intention to emphasize the importance of enhancing China’s comprehensive national power, his view is one-sided in theory and unworkable in practice.

First of all, such a view marks a deviation from our country’s long-standing foreign policy of independence and peace. Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, our country has been

an active member of the international community, having made major contributions to the causes of thwarting hegemonism and safeguarding world peace. To be sure, we have not always been perfect in pursuing these goals and we still have some lessons to learn. However, the goal of learning from the lessons of the past is to make further, greater contributions to safeguard world peace and promote the progressive causes of mankind, rather than to isolate ourselves from the world.

Secondly, an “isolationist” view is directly against the mega trend of global development. Influenced by the rapid development in information technology, our global village is becoming smaller and smaller. All countries are mutually dependent in economics, mutually influenced by security. You are within us, we are within you; mutually reliant and mutually restrictive. No country can be isolated from others and still survive. To create an international environment more favorable to our socialist modernization, China has no choice but to deepen its participation and involvement in international affairs. Going back to isolationism not only violates the logic and trend of global development, but also goes against China’s self interest.

Thirdly, in calculating our national strength, we should not be overly self-confident, nor should we ever underestimate ourselves or attack our own self-esteem. I believe that the article “Strength Gap is the Reality,” while calculating the national strength of China and cautioning modesty among us, seems to have looked down upon ourselves. It fails to see that China has successfully resisted the shock waves of the Asian financial crisis or that China continues to enjoy a high rate of economic growth. The article exaggerates the difficulties China faces in its stride forward, emphasizing instead that China’s situation has been “troublesome.” It fails to see that over the last 20 years, after much hardship, China overall has narrowed the gap between itself and the economic powerhouses of the world. On the contrary, the article erroneously concludes that the “gap has been widening further and further.” The article cites the “Surpass England and Catch up to the United States Campaign” during the Great Leap Forward period as an example of an impractical slogan, noting that “all-out campaigns to ‘surpass and catch up’ will likely end up with all-out failures.” I believe, however, that while we should learn from the lessons of the Great Leap Forward era, we should not abandon and denounce entirely our will and determination to surpass and catch up to developed countries. The article further states that we should develop “step by step.” That is right. But in which direction should we develop? In the long run, our goal is to surpass and catch up to the most advanced in the world, even if to reach that goal, it will take time and sweat.

Fourthly, shouldn’t weaker and smaller countries also get involved “in others’ business”? Failure to do so is a violation of the principle that “all member nations have equal sovereign rights” as stated in the United Nations Charter. The world belongs to all countries. World affairs should be jointly dealt with through equal consultations by all sovereign countries. Countries, big or small, all have equal rights to represent themselves, never to allow a few strong powers to bully smaller countries, “to mind everybody’s business,” to act as the “world leader and world cop,” as exemplified by the United States in the invasions of Panama and in the bombing of Yugoslavia. Only when all the weaker and smaller countries of the world become united and form a solidarity to resolutely fight

against hegemonism and mind each others' business can we stop the momentum of hegemonism and guarantee world peace. Fighting against hegemonism and "Might Makes Right" politics has been an important component of our country's independent, self-determining peaceful foreign policy. It must be carried out indefinitely.

Fifthly, the Chinese proverbs "hiding our wisdom and never letting it be revealed" and "taking action" are dialectical in their relation. "Strength Gap Is Reality" only stresses one element and ignores the other, thus practically making these two antagonistic. There is no doubt that we must stick to the policy of "hiding our wisdom and never letting it be revealed," focusing our resources on strengthening our economic power, defense capability and national cohesiveness. But we must also "take action." We must never allow ourselves to be isolated from others. As Comrade Deng Xiaoping eloquently states, "it is impossible [for China] not to take action on international affairs. We must take action. Take what action? I believe that we must actively promote the establishment of a new order of international politics and economy." ["Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping," Volume three, p. 363] At the welcoming ceremony for the return of our embassy staff in Yugoslavia, President Jiang Zemin stated: "Mankind has reached the critical point of maintaining world peace, promoting overall development. All the countries and peoples who love peace and uphold justice should now be united. To fight against hegemonism and "Might Makes Right" politics, to promote the establishment of just and reasonable international new order, let us struggle together!"